

## Communication Strategies

### Module C, Section 2

People who choose **My Voice, My Choice** as their waiver program will have a variety of disabilities; some may communicate using alternative strategies (e.g., Bliss symbols, picture cards, assistive technology devices). A few, may communicate through their behaviors, others may have systems of communication that you will need to learn. For example, one young man uses toe tapping to communicate; each number he taps corresponds to a different word. As his Support Broker, you would need to carry around his “number to word” translation book until you became familiar and comfortable with his system of sharing his thoughts. To follow are descriptions about a variety of communication strategies. Remember, the *best teacher* is the person you serve.

- Some individuals who cannot speak use a combination of things to get their needs and thoughts across. Gestures such as pointing, head nodding or turning, blinking or toe tapping could all have unique meanings to your individual employers. How do you know? Pay attention to people who provide supports – friends, family or paid staff. Make a list of what important gestures mean and don’t be afraid to ask when you don’t understand.
- Some individuals may use behaviors to best express their thoughts and feelings. How individuals express contentment, happiness, irritation and confusion just to name a few are all important for a Support Broker to understand. Sharing experiences with your employer and his or her friends and family are helpful to learn what behaviors mean. Make sure you interact with your employer in different settings such as at home, at work, and doing fun things like going out to dinner.
- You may meet individuals who speak, but are very difficult to understand. Sometimes, they may use devices such as a communication board that looks like a typewriter. Using this type of tool, they spell out word by word what they wish to say. Once you get to know them, you may realize that they just have to start a word and you quickly figure it out. A word of caution, however. It is important to ask frequently if you have understood – don’t assume.
- Electronic communication devices may be used by individuals to help them communicate with others. Words or phrases are often programmed into the machine for quick communication. People can also type out their entire message one letter at a time. This process can be laborious for person using the system. Be patient- even though it may take time, the device is the means to share a voice. Often people who use augmentative communication devices also communicate through gestures, head nods, moods, and other behaviors. It is important to get to know all the ways the person you support talks to you.